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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses three aspects of community participation used in Los Angeles junior high schools--education aides, a volunteer program, and school-community advisory councils. The author describes the roles of the three groups and discusses their effectiveness, emphasizing that successes or failures of community participation are tied to the principal's definition of the situation. (JF)

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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND AIDE PROGRAM

by
Albert Cartwright

There is an increasing national concern for the trend of secondary education in metropolitan areas stemming out of the social, political, economic and scientific forces which have undergone accelerated change. A mounting wave of public interest in education and the role of the school has brought forth various manifestations of curiosity, criticism, and expectation by the general public and by special groups. This trend has been increasingly evident in the growing and changing metropolitan area of Los Angeles.

Today even minimum community involvement takes on more than one aspect. In the Los Angeles School District there is more than one way of meeting this involvement. In all of them the principal is the key. Successes or failures of community participation are irrevocably tied to the principal's definition of the situation.

The junior high schools in Los Angeles have three different areas of community participation. One is the use of Education Aides, a second is Volunteer Program, while the third is the School-Community Advisory Council. Each of these is promoted by the school district.

An Education Aide in Los Angeles junior high schools is an adult from the community with an interest in education, who likes children, wants to help and senses the career possibilities. There are three types of Education Aides:

1. Education Aide I - assists school personnel by performing unskilled, non classroom duties related to the safety of pupils, storage of supplies and equipment, direction of students and visitors, and clerical duties.
2. Education Aide II - assists a department, grade level, or group of certificated employees by performing routine clerical, manual, and monitoring duties supporting class or school activities.
3. Education Aide III - assists a teacher with clerical, preparatory, follow up, and routine class, office, school and/or related educational activities.

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Assignment of community persons to Education Aide positions is made from district lists. They become regular classified employees. The original use of Education Aides was made possible by funds from the following fund sources:

Reading Task Force

E.M.R. Transition

Inner City Conversion

State Gifted

School Determined Needs

Other Special District Funds

Now up to 50% of the Education Aide positions in the district may be residency restricted. This was to provide employment for community people in positions in their local schools. Junior high school administrators, teachers, community people, and the district wide evaluation of the Education Aide program have attested to the fact that this program has made definite contributions in raising the aspirational and achievement level of students in junior high schools.

The Los Angeles School District is working towards developing Upward Mobility opportunities for aides. Higher classifications with appropriate responsibilities are being considered. Administrators are being asked to assist in the development of new classifications that would enhance the educational program within the individual school. All in all, within the financial limits of the district, the future looks bright for individual junior high schools as well as other schools of the district to gain much help from the community.

Another program in the Los Angeles City Schools involving the community is the School Volunteer Program. The purpose of this program is to develop an organization of Volunteers to assist teachers and bring enrichment to the 700,000 children in Los Angeles schools, particularly to children from economically depressed areas and from culturally different homes.

The School Volunteers are men and women of all ages, in all walks of life, who are willing to serve a minimum of ½ day a week. They are united by one common purpose, an interest in helping children. Any parent or citizen can be a volunteer.

Volunteers serve under the direction of school administrators and teachers. The program is characterized by its extreme flexibility and duties vary from classroom to classroom. Most volunteers assist teachers by helping children who need individual attention, preparing teaching materials, reading stories, correcting workbooks, making posters, typing, performing many clerical tasks, and working in school libraries. Volunteers, who have special skills, bring enrichment to the school program. Pianists, singers, actors and artists are included in this group.

Principals of junior high schools in Los Angeles who have organized this volunteer program in their schools have found them to be very valuable. The proof of this success lies in the fact that all the boys and girls having had the services of school volunteers and tutors have greatly improved in their studies.

Deputy Superintendent James B. Taylor has said: "School Volunteers are here to stay, and the need for, and the value of, School Volunteer Building Teams is a city-wide phenomenon. School volunteers and school personnel are seeking ways to cooperate with one another. For they are impelled to realize that cooperative relationships are essential to the educational progress of our youth."

For the future this program will continue to grow. This necessitates that proper steps are taken at the local school level to promote the volunteer program so that even better qualified volunteers may be secured. An effective and varied staff development program for volunteers is being geared up. A unique approach to training called "Operation Teamwork" has been launched. This has been designed to aid local schools in meeting their present and future needs with school volunteers through effective recruiting, orientation, training, retaining and recognizing school volunteers.

In answer to requests by principals and teachers, two In-Service Training classes as to how to best utilize the services of school volunteers will be started for secondary teachers.

School-Community Advisory Councils have been organized in each of the schools of the Los Angeles District. Basically the school-community advisory idea is a valid and valuable one. It suggests that one can make use of previously untapped forces of strength in the community in order to improve the educative process. Community relations is considered a means not an end for this improvement.

In Los Angeles, these councils were appointed by the principal in some cases, with the provision for later addition of elected members of the Advisory Council. Other councils were elected completely. All councils have faculty representation, while all junior high schools have student representation.

The purpose of the School-Community Advisory Council is to advise the principal in matters pertaining to the school and its educational program. The group is a resource to the principal, who remains responsible for decisions which are necessary in the administration and supervision of the school.

Each school advisory council establishes its own rules regarding the time and place of meeting, quorum requirements, and the means of publicizing its actions. All meetings are open to the public. The council elects its own presiding officer, with the principal as an ex-officio non voting member.

Evaluation of all existing councils is contemplated by the Superintendent of Schools at the end of the 1971-72 school year. This evaluation of the effectiveness of the council program would also include any recommendations which might be made based on the evaluation.

The local School-Community Advisory Council is not a miracle cure-all. Nor can it substitute for overdue system-wide improvements in educational programs and organization, particularly as they relate to children who are different. In the hands of a caring principal, the council can be a valuable tool for better diagnosis, relevant prescription and realistic preventive actions where local school practices are concerned.

These three uses of community participation have given varying results in each school. The use of individual aides and volunteers in schools seems to offer greater results for the instructional program because they are tied to the classroom and individual pupil. Teachers and administrators are most happy with the added assistance which they have. Increased learning is going on in schools because of this help.

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